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Question Time: Hawaii raises smoking age to 21

State becomes first in the nation to raise age from 18

**By Rob Burgess
Tribune night editor**

The legal age for purchasing of tobacco products is currently 18 in all 50 states. But, late last week, Hawaii changed all that.

“Starting next year, Hawaii will become the first state in the nation to ban smoking for people under 21,” reported Jeff Guo of The Washington Post on Tuesday. “[Democratic] Gov. David Ige signed the historic legislation on [June 19], which imposes fines on underage smokers and those who provide them with tobacco products.”

According to the text of the bill, the impetus for this shift can be traced to the rise in popularity of electronic cigarettes.

“The legislature finds that the use of electronic smoking devices is prevalent among adolescents in Hawaii,” reads the opening of Hawaii Senate Bill 1030. “According to recent figures from six Hawaii high schools, among the ninth- and tenth-grade students, 29 percent have used electronic smoking devices at least once and eighteen percent use them regularly. This sample's rate of electronic smoking device use by adolescents is

considerably higher than rates in current studies of adolescents in other areas of the United States. The legislature further finds that electronic smoking devices are popular among adolescents and the majority regard electronic smoking devices as healthier than cigarettes. However, using electronic smoking devices in most instances exposes adolescents to nicotine, which is a highly addictive substance. Therefore, in addition to preventing electronic smoking device use by adolescents, more research is needed to test why electronic smoking devices appeal to adolescents and whether using electronic smoking devices carries more benefits than risks."

So, we wanted to know: "Do you think this is a good idea? Why or why not?"

Yes

"Yes, because smoking cigarettes is terrible for your health, and has no benefit whatsoever." — **Andrew Renshaw**

"I think it's good. I know that at 18 I thought I knew everything. But, you really don't. It's not to say it will stop people from doing it younger, but it's worth a shot. A few more years to make a decision that could change your body for the rest of your life is a good thing." — **Erin Walters Burns**

"Yes, but smoking is bad for any age." — **Martha Pendleton**

No

“So, you can fight and die for our country at 18, but you can't smoke or drink at 18? Makes a lot of sense. Maybe the legal age limit to join the military should be changed to 21 as well.” — **Jessica Ingle**

“I think there are bigger problems in this world and probably in that state, that they can spend their brainpower on.” — **Peggy Phillips**

“What difference does it make? If they want to smoke, they'll borrow, beg, or steal one. Just like beer. Who enforces it? I quit smoking 35 years ago. It took me 17 years to figure out, it was unhealthy.” — **John Wilkinson**

Our answers

“I'm on the fence. Raising the minimum age to me, speaks to responsibility. Is an 18-year-old responsible enough to make long term health decisions? Probably not. So in that regard, I think the change is for the best. However, smoking does more harm in the long haul and I don't feel it necessarily impairs judgement, whereas drinking, for example clearly does. For this reason, I think the additional three years won't make much of a difference when the real consequence for a smoker may not be seen for years to come.” — **Autumn Ricketts**

“I'm all for reducing nicotine use among youth — and every other age group — but I fear arbitrarily setting a higher age minimum for smoking a cigarette or e-cig won't be effective. Teens already flout the current minimum: I've seen that about 80 percent of smokers tried their first

cigarette before age 18. So what do I suggest instead? Give the kids chores, a bike and a part-time job. They'll be too busy to get in trouble.” — **Sarah Einselen**

“I get where these Hawaiian legislators are coming from, I really do. I’ve heard plenty of people wringing their hands about e-cigarettes being used, not to stair step down from cigarettes to cessation, but to ramp up to smoking in the first place. This may be anecdotal, but I can totally see it happening. Also, these e-cigarettes haven’t been around long enough for us to accurately test their safety, so who knows how that is going to pan out long term. Any age you pick for these adult vices is going to be arbitrary, so I don’t see the big deal in changing it from 18 to 21. I also understand the serving in the military and voting at 18, but not being able to smoke or drink until 21 arguments, but, if anything, we should be raising the ages for military induction instead of lowering them.” — **Rob Burgess**

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